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# EUROPEAN MARITIME HERITAGE

# NEWSLETTER

No. 9. JUNE 2001



## Sharing our Ships

by Mr. John Robinson, Heritage Afloat

When Henk Dessens and Willem Mörzer Bruyns planned the meeting in 1992 at Amsterdam's Maritime Museum out of which the EMH organisation subsequently sprang, they chose a conference title which referred to Europe's *common* maritime heritage. The ships and boats we cherish each belong to a particular nation, but they frequently carry their national flag into the harbours of other nations. It is difficult for a seafarer not to feel a sense of excitement and comradeship on seeing an unfamiliar foreign ensign on a visiting ship in one's home port. It reminds us that the sea is a highway which we all share.

Caring for the traditional ships that carry these different flags is a responsibility that transcends national frontiers. The various European nations that have

compiled a register or census of ships and boats rated as important in their national history (including Finland, France, Norway, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom) are all aware how many vessels that qualify for inclusion on the Register of their current host-nation may also have significance in the history of other maritime nations whose flag they may once have flown. The most comprehensive and best-preserved fleet of English wooden fishing ketches is now to be found, not in the U.K. but in Sweden, where dozens of them moved when they were ousted from England's east coast fishing ports by the arrival of powered trawlers.

The steam tug *St. Knud*, built to serve the port of Odense in Denmark, moved to England to assist china-clay freighters in the harbour at Fowey before becoming

an exhibit at the Exeter Maritime Museum for more than 30 years. Now she flies the Swedish flag, having been restored to steaming order to tow barges to Stockholm under the name *Stockvik*. Thus this venerable steamship is a cultural monument in at least three European nations.

Another vessel that has earned herself a place in the affection of at least three countries is the sailing trawler *Angèle Aline* built as a "dundee" in Fécamp in 1921 for a French owner near Gravelines. Her designer introduced the 'arriere ronde' type of stern, an  
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*The Angèle Aline*

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## Sharing our Ships...

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extension aft of the main hull structure intended to provide extra lift and buoyancy when trawling in a following sea. During the 1930s she acquired a Belgian fishing number when working out of Nieuwpoort. In May 1940 she was requisitioned under French army control, to help evacuate British, Canadian, French and Polish soldiers from the beaches at Dunkirk, as German armies invaded and occupied France. *Angèle Aline* is believed to have made two trips to the Dunkirk beaches, and would surely have been greeted as an 'Angel' by the 550 Allied soldiers whom she carried to safety in Ramsgate or Dover.

The retreating British forces scuttled her to block the port of St. Vaast, but *Angèle Aline* was raised soon afterwards, and continued fishing commercially off the French and Belgian coasts, until the German forces scuttled her again to block the entrance to Nieuwpoort. After 6 months on the bed of the entrance channel, she was raised again, refitted and continued to fish commercially until 1963, by which time she was no longer profitable, and she was converted to a floating home. Little is known of her history for the next 20 years, until the early 1980s when *Angèle Aline* was found in poor condition tied up near Shorsham power station on



England's south coast and refitted for a proposed trip around the world, which proceeded only as far as Turkey. There she recouped some of the cost of repair by chartering. In 1990 she came back to British waters to her present owner, who has extensively repaired her hull and rigging, and now regularly sails her with a volunteer crew.

Destinations are usually English harbours accessible from her Hamble base, with occasional visits to Ireland in the summer.

To mark her 80th birthday

this year, *Angèle Aline* will revisit her birthplace in Fécamp in May 2001, when it is hoped to welcome on board some people who still remember the trawler (launched as *Jules Tallux* in 1921) when she fished under the French and Belgian flags. Advance publicity for this visit in local newspapers may bring forward people who can help to fill in the various gaps in what we know of the history of this vessel, which has survived so many adventures under the flags of no less than three European nations.

**EMH now on the Internet:**  
**[www.european-maritime-heritage.org](http://www.european-maritime-heritage.org)**

# The Thorny Question of Decommissioning in the British Fishing Fleet and its Impact on our Fishing Heritage

by Mr. Mike Smylie, co-founder of the 40+ Fishing Boat Association

## The Background

Let's begin with what we all agree with - there's a fundamental over-capacity in Europe's fishing capability. That means, in essence, that there are too many fishing boats chasing too few fish and, given that the fish stocks continually shrink, the problem has been progressively getting worse for over two decades. This is supposedly the basis of all government policy towards the fishing industries throughout Europe.

However, the first question that attracts debate in Britain, and the one we might as well get over quickly, is the matter of Britain's majority stake in the European fishing grounds. This is estimated to be approximately 65% and was negotiated away as part of Britain's entry into what was then the Common Market in the 1970s. It has remained a contentious point within the fishing community ever since, especially after the country's entry into the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) in 1984. We had prodigious fishing areas yet a fleet under threat.

The general consensus here in Britain is that Brussels is purposefully destroying the British fishing industry while just as intently supporting those of other countries such as Spain. It is not my intention to discuss this but I only mention it for its

importance when reviewing the current policy of decommissioning. What the fishermen fail to understand is why they are constantly told of the need to cut back even more while boats from other countries are allowed to fish almost within their sight as they stand idly watching. They could accept drastic measures if these were seen to be universal. And to make matters worse, while the British fleet shrinks, the Spanish and others get massive state help to modernise.

In Britain all fishery matters are governed by the *Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food*, otherwise known as MAFF. We call it the Ministry of Awful Fishing Flunkies, amongst other things! Like elsewhere, fishing ability is controlled by MAFF through the system of licensing and quotas that are set by Brussels. TACs are Total Allowable Catches and are decided upon by politicians, scientists and fishing representatives. Each boat has a set quota dependent on the country's TAC and that boat's VCU (Vessel Capacity Unit) which in turn is dependent on its size and its engine power [a vessel's VCU is calculated as being:  $LOA \text{ in metres} \times \text{beam in metres} + \text{engine power in kW} \times 0,45$ ].

Given that conservation of stocks was of primary importance, the European

Commission came up with the idea of the Multi Annual Guidance Programme (MAGP). This reduction and, whereas individual governments

can determine the sectors where the cuts are made, the percentage of these cuts is decided by Brussels. Thus came the ill thought-out decommissioning policy.



## Decommissioning

Decommissioning, by definition, is the removal of a ship from its service. The intention of the policy stemming from Brussels was to decrease the size of member states' fishing fleets by paying grants out to those willing to take up the scheme. Those accepted by the tendering process nominate the amount of money for which they would give up their licence and fulfil certain requirements that would ensure the boat didn't ever fish again. The Council Regulation itself allows three options for the disposal of craft - scrapping, designation to uses outside fishing and designation to countries outside Europe - yet the British

government insisted on the first option. Thus began the annual Great Fishing Boat Destruction. A destruction that has resulted in more than just the loss of hundreds of fine fishing craft as whole communities are laid bare to the reality of the loss of a way of life that has ensured employment for its members for decades, if not centuries.

The figures for decommissioning tell the story - 246 vessels lost between 1983 and 1987 in Britain at a cost of £17.8 million. Then, in the 1990s another round spent a massive £50.3 million decommissioning 682 boats. These are MAFF's own figures that have  
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resulted in 928 boats being withdrawn by the lure of massive grants, grants that amounted to values far in excess of the actual value of boat and license. For the larger boats a value of over £1,000 per VCU has been paid, sums that have only served to exaggerate the second-hand value of craft and the trading value of the licenses. Those young fishermen entering the industry find it impossible to gain a footing and consequently fishing has been laid into the laps of the powerful few.

The scrapping policy has had its consequences too, especially on the maritime heritage field. Almost a thousand vessels, the majority being wooden traditional fishing craft, have been destroyed by various means that include being set alight on beaches, being bulldozed into quarries, being chopped up piece by piece by chainsaw and being smashed apart by mechanical diggers prior to being burnt as firewood. Unceremonious ends for superbly efficient seagoing craft. And spectacles that have upset fishermen and public alike as well as being described as one of the most pointless actions ever undertaken by a British government.

The debate over the validity of decommissioning has centred on several points. Firstly it tends to target the older, less efficient craft while the successful boats it should be targeting remain fishing. For them the carrot

is not big enough. So the fleet becomes more modern and effective at the expense of the tax payer. Thus more fish is caught. And those that do decommission then use their money to buy new under 10m craft thus negating their withdrawal. But the most important fact about decommissioning is that it has been an utter waste of money. After the 1997 round when £13.9 million was spent decommissioning 104 vessels the British National Audit Office - the government watchdog of state spending - said that *"as a result in our view the scheme was grossly expensive for what it achieved"*. Not the sort of stuff governments like to hear. Yet, it seems, they are deaf to the industry as more money is forthcoming as I write.

The 40+ Fishing Boat Association has been fighting against the enforced scrapping of fishing craft since 1995, a time when the maritime heritage movement ignored the passing of an era. For fishing, although only contributing 0.06% to the domestic GNP (gross national product) has its roots firmly placed in the developing history of the country. It is, after all, one of the oldest professions around. Given that decommissioning is happening - and we certainly do not accept the need for its reality - we see one inherent problem in the policy and that is the requirement for the decommissioned vessel not to fish again. For it is the license alone that governs the



fishing ability so we have argued that this, and only this, should be surrendered on payment of the grant and then the boat's owner can dispose of the vessel however he wishes. He could, in fact, fish with it once more on the purchase of a license, for still the overall numbers of licenses will have been reduced. Surely it is better to retain an element of the less efficient craft if conservation is the prime mover in the policy. And if he wished to diversify it follows that he has more chance of this if he retains his beloved boat.

But common-sense doesn't come into decision-making at the heart of any govern-

ment. There's always some excuse and in this case they told us that, because the state didn't own the license, then they couldn't decommission it alone. But that, surely, is what they are doing anyway, with the boat thrown in for good measure. Typical window-dressing in fact. So we suggested a way that boats could be kept account of to prevent re-entry into fishing registers. Too much money they said. So they came up with a hopeless policy whereby vessels could belong to recognised museums to be leased to individuals. A handful of craft were thus saved before the museum body suggested against museums becoming dumping grounds for old boats.

The British government has just announced that they are willing to spend another £36  
(continued...)

**The 40+ Fishing Boat Association** was formed by Mike Smylie and Michael Craine in 1995.  
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Web site at <http://homepages.enterprise.net/mlrscraine00000/index.htm> .

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million this year to fund more destruction or 'legalised vandalism' as it has been described. And why? Because, after nearly twenty years, we are still catching too much fish. Proof, then, that the policy doesn't work. Proof that decommissioning is a failed policy of successive governments. Proof, at last, that MAFF should be funding other ways of decreasing fishing ability.

But the unusual point this time round is that MAFF are having to use their own money from existing budgets. For the Treasury will not cough up, as in Fisheries Minister Elliot Morley's own words "[it] is not convinced that decommissioning is value for money", in echoes of the NAO words. In Scotland, where £25 million is being spent, the Scottish Executive managed to overturn an earlier decision by the Scottish Parliament to fund tie-up schemes instead of decommissioning as the industry itself wanted.

The Executive didn't like the decision, so in fine undemocratic style, they used arm-twisting to get it reversed. So much for democracy by politicians who have no understanding of the fishing industry whatsoever.

So what will happen this time round? We have been informed that there are no plans to limit disposal options for vessels entering the decommissioning scheme. However, as MAFF point out, European Legislation dictates that if vessels are transferred to countries outside Europe or reassigned to other uses, only 50% of the grant is payable. Scrapping gets 100% except in the case of a vessel going to a museum. Call that a level playing field when the exaggerated prices would mean that even if a prospective buyer had to pay the other 50% for a boat he would still be paying more than the market value of that vessel. For that's the only way MAFF can get fishermen to decommission. Like

British farmers during the current foot & mouth outbreak who get approximately £90 a sheep when the market value a year ago was hardly £5 in some cases, and thus are happy to cull. No wonder the farmers' unions don't want vaccination.

So we are told that, to escape the chop, a boat must enter a museum. So, then, will we read headlines such as "Fishing museums must not become 'a boat hire business'" (Museums Journal Aug. 1996 page 13)? For the general opinion within the museum fraternity is that only limited representative fishing boats should be saved while the rest are destroyed. This, for them, has added the attraction that specific boats are more liable to receive funding if their numbers are limited. So it's not surprising that they advocate limited protection.

The 40+ Fishing Boat Association does not accept

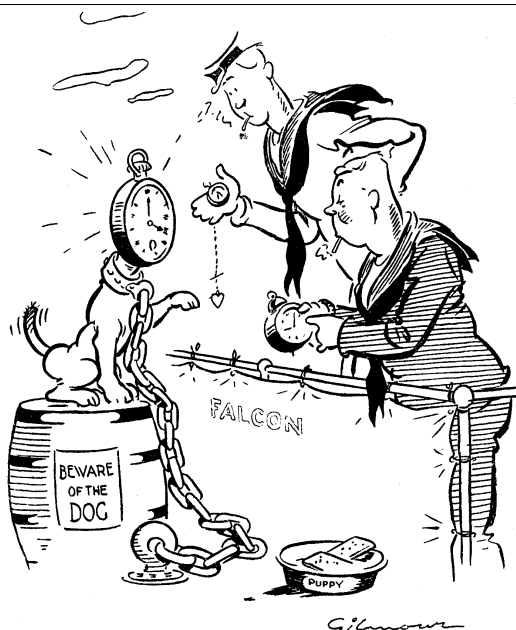
the need for one single scrapping, given the limited number of these craft left. It believes that by a system of registration concurrent with the existing fishing registers, whereby decommissioned vessels are clearly marked as so, no vessel should be able to commence fishing again. It also believes that the present European legislation should be altered so that the licence alone is surrendered. Given that the whole Common Fisheries Policy is both flawed and up for replacement in 2002, we can only hope that, once this current scheme is completed, the whole decommissioning package will be shelved. This time round we fight for a non-scrapping compliance. Next time we will push for a fundamental review of fishing legislation, for the fact is clear - **decommissioning is an aid to the destruction of a sustainable fishery as well as being complimentary to the destruction of our maritime heritage.**

#### THE DOG WATCH.

Time at sea is reckoned in 4-hour watches. The middle watch begins at midnight and ends at 4 a.m. Then comes the morning watch until 8 a.m. The forenoon watch lasts until noon and the afternoon watch until 4 p.m. From 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. there are two watches of two hours each. These are called the "dog" watches and are so arranged that all sailors shall have what is termed "eight hours in and eight hours out" every other night.

In other words, the dog watch has the effect of alternating the duties.

Dog, by the way, is a corruption of "dodge." A watch is ended by the striking of eight bells—but four bells struck at 6 p.m. means the ending of the first "dog" watch.



From John Reynolds we have received a book of humorous nautical cartoons, probably dating from the 1930s. Originally the book belonged to Mr. Reynolds' father.

In this and coming issues of the EMH Newsletter we will publish pages from the book, hoping that our readers will enjoy the humour.

If anyone recognizes the cartoons and are able to give us some background information on their origin, we would be pleased to receive a note.

## Nautical Cartoons

### Part V

# The EMH President invites you

to participate in the 4th Common  
European Maritime Heritage Congress in  
Barcelona 27-30 June 2001

Dear Friend,

The *4th European Maritime Heritage Congress* is being held in Barcelona as a joint Congress together with the *1st Conference of European Maritime Museums*. After the inventory-focused 1st EMH congress in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, the loose network of private owners and operators of traditional ships made the decision to organize themselves as an independent umbrella association at the 2nd Congress in Rochefort, France.

The 3rd Congress in Helsingør, Denmark, showed EMH as a recognized partner representing the European floating heritage towards national and European authorities, prepared to take full responsibility even for its safe operation.

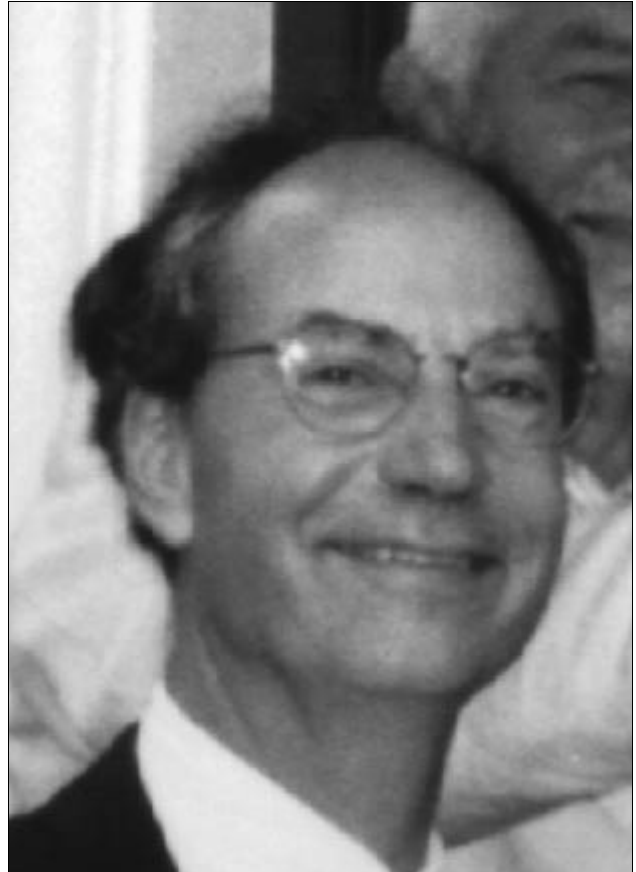
The 4th congress in Barcelona, Spain, is devoted to one of the very basic objectives of the EMH. It is therefore that the EMH took the initiative to put together the vast experience of about 5.000 owners of traditional ships and craft to the deep sources of scientific knowledge collected in the maritime museums.

We do hope that this Congress will serve as a fruitful stimulation for future collaboration in order to preserve, develop and display our European maritime tradition with all its broad variety of ships, craft, boats and skills.

The main ideas behind the programme are:

- To present the EU and UNESCO programmes for maritime heritage and coastal culture;
- to activate our minds about what we are doing and why we are doing it in this way or another by putting the research and preservation ideas versus using and operation methods;
- to compare different ideas about classification and definitions of traditional ships and craft; and
- to highlight the growing amount of maritime festivals and events as new opportunities to display to the public the maritime heritage in its widest meaning.

Welcome  
Anders Berg  
President of European Maritime Heritage



*Mr. Anders Berg, President of the EMH*

## Still time for a “last minute” entry to the 4th EMH Congress

Call, fax, or e-mail the congress organizer:

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...and see the congress programme on the EMH  
website:

[www.european-maritime-heritage.org](http://www.european-maritime-heritage.org)